



The Other Middle Kingdom: A Brief History of Muslims in China

By Chiara Betta

Translated by Phylis Lan Lin and Cheng Fang

(in English and Chinese)



The history of Muslims in China spans more than fourteen centuries and cannot be exhaustively analyzed in a single work. Notwithstanding the inevitable limitations of space, *The Other Middle Kingdom* will attempt to present this often-overlooked chapter of Chinese history, which has been revalued by scholars from various academic disciplines only in recent years. The main aim of this study is to challenge the widespread stereotype of China as a highly homogenous country. Westerners not well acquainted with Chinese cultural heritage often consider China as monolithic nation where everyone speaks the same language, eats rice, and shares similar, if not identical, cultural practices. This perception is distorted, given the fact that China is characterized by enormous cultural and linguistic differences among even the Han Chinese nationality (minzu) (Gladney, 1998).

This study is divided into two parts. The first touches on early Muslim life in China and highlights the fact that Muslims underwent a process of cross-cultural adaptation in the host environment from the Yuan period onward. It also discusses the 1759 conquest of the central Asian region of Xinjiang, which brought a large population of Turkic Muslims under the control of the Qing Empire. The second part discusses the twentieth century and dissects the ten Muslim nationalities recognized by the People's Republic of China (PRC).

Chiara Betta completed her first degree in Oriental Languages and Literature at the University of Venice in Italy in 1990 after studying Chinese and Chinese history at Beijing University for two years with a scholarship provided by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1997, she was awarded a Ph.D. in modern Chinese history at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Professor Betta's research interests concentrate on Shanghai's social history and the trade diasporas of Baghdadi Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. With the encouragement of Dr. Phylis Lan Lin of the University of Indianapolis, Professor Betta has recently started to research the history of Islam in China and the question of ethnic nationalism in Chinese Central Asia.

Professor Betta has presented papers at international conferences in the United States, China, Italy, France, Great Britain, Germany, Portugal, Israel, and Greece. Her recent publications include the contribution of chapters in the volumes *The Jews of China: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (edited by Jonathan Goldstein) and *New Frontiers: Imperialism's New Communities in East Asia, 1842-1952* (edited by Robert Bickers and Christian Henriot).

Professor Betta is writing a book entitled *Tycoon: Silas Hardoon in Old and New Shanghai, 1874-1997*, which is based on her Ph.D. and dissertation. Dr. Betta has been teaching at the University of Indianapolis-Athens since 1999.



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